

RPG Crossroads

Amber (Phage Press) >> Blood Loyalties >> PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro

PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 05/09/2004 at 16:31:34

You wake uneasily. The Castle, still somewhat a foreign world to you, is laden with the air of fear and mistrust. The hallways are more silent than they have been in the recent past, as some of the Castle Guards are now serving in the City itself. You awoke earlier than usual - sleeping in the Castle's disturbingly tense atmosphere is very difficult, as the silence has grown quite louder of late. You stop by Sterling's rooms, but he has gone out for some reason.

As your mind wanders, you find yourself walking a battlement of the Castle. The sun is coming up, and it is bright and radiant. It is a slight relief to feel the warmth on your face as you look out over the mountainside and into the City below and the Forest beyond. But the normal sounds of the morning - birds singing, wind softly whifing by, the tramp of feet on the courtyards below - all seem soft and diminished, and the feeling of unease creeps back behind your eyes.

As you contemplate the day, you hear some rustling below you. On the balcony down one floor and to the left, you hear someone walking slowly. The amount of noise from clothing suggests a more formal attire. You hear very calm and relaxed breathing.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/03/2004 at 02:11:24

Still a stranger amongst family. The feeling is regrettable, but not unfamiliar. Back in Nippon, I held a position of honor and respect, but distanced from all. Is this to be my karma? To climb the ladder once again from the lowly dregs to the lofty heights? I did it once - I shall do it again. There are times I curse you, Sterling, and if you were here, I would do so face to face as honor demands. I curse you for waking me from the shadows and delivering me to the true world. That begs the question; where are you, and what purpose do I serve here and now? These are things I should meditate on, but alas, I find my mind wandering as I walk through the castle, and I am unable to focus. The air in the castle is tense, like the quiet before the storm. Even the prospect of a new day, with all the hope its rays promise, do little to eliminate the overcast of dread.

Focus and calm yourself, boy. It all starts with breathing. I envy you below me, your calmness. Who is that down there, anyway? Ahhh, crap, there goes your focus, Shiro. At least my curiosity will be sated, if not my mind relaxed. Boldly, Shiro peers over to look down to see who is below him.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/03/2004 at 08:20:16

You lean over the battlement, and you see the beautiful face of Queen Vialle on a lower balcony. You know her to be blind, and yet she stares out as if surveying the landscape. She is wearing formal court attire, and a cup of tea sits on a nearby side table, untouched.

You indeed see that she is calm and quiet. But at the same time, you see redness near the corner of her eyes, and her face has a sad and forlorn expression that speaks volumes to the anguish she feels at her husband's disappearance. She is just standing there, staring without seeing, deep in contemplative thought.

But as you study her, your footing slips for just a moment and you slide an inch downwards on the battlement wall you had pulled yourself up with to see her. It's only a brief noise, but her head immediately turns and focuses directly on you.

"Who is there? Tell me, or I will summon the guards."

You answer curtly, somewhat taken aback by your discovery. "It is Shiro. We have met briefly when I was introduced to the court. I heard someone below and wished to know who it was. I humbly apologize for my intrusion."

Her face brightens visibly. "Shiro? I have not spent much time with you yet - but I would wish to. Could you come down and have tea with me in the Solarium? I will confess that I am just familiar enough with your homeland to know that I could not attempt to observe all the practices you associate with tea - but I hope you will forgive me the errors I will make. My mind is so unfocused now - I would welcome the chance to relax a little, to speak with you and know you better. It is, of course, your choice - but I would much enjoy some of your time." She smiles winsomely, and brushes away her hair. You, of course, catch the subtle motion she makes to wipe away a few tears as well.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/03/2004 at 11:24:55

"It would be my pleasure, my Queen. I'll be there in just a moment." Shiro quickly makes his way down to the Solarium. Within a few minutes, Shiro is seated with the Queen. "It is kind of you to invite me to tea, your Highness, and that you have taken an interest in my culture's tea ceremony. But it is I who should be learning the customs of Amber, for I am the newcomer. Since my arrival, I have spent my time travelling your Golden Circle, learning what I can. The ways here are strange, no less strange than my ways might seem to others, I suppose - but I am coping and adapting." He is not quite sure how to proceed in the conversation... "Has there been any word about the King?"

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/03/2004 at 11:34:36

The Solarium of Castle Amber is particularly captivating. The glass has embedded prisms in it, and the light sparkles like stars in many different places around the chamber. In addition, there is a wind chime arrangement near one of the openings that let fresh air in the room, and it is a very soothing ambience. You feel the tension of the morning slip away as you step into the private and protected world of the Solarium. A tea service is on the central table, and Queen Vialle sits placidly on one of the couches facing the table. She is holding the same cup of tea you saw earlier, but this time it is only half-full. She rises as you enter, and responds with grace and respect to your gesture of greeting. She bids you sit on a couch on the other side of the table, and she sits at the same time you do.

"I have tried to become familiar with each of the children, and the worlds they are exploring and learning from, as their experiences will become important influences as they take their places in the powers of Amber, or decline to as they choose. I have spoken with Sterling many times, and each time he is more impressed and astounded at your discipline, your prowess, your practicality and your cunning. You are a strong and formidable warrior, and you are yet finding greater reserves of strength and determination within you. Although I have no knowledge, it would not surprise me if you were of Benedict's line. He has even shown a recent interest in the more..." and she searches for a word, "...structured societies such as yours. I believe he has been to Nippon once or twice on his travels." She takes a sip of tea as she listens to your response. "I am much glad to hear that you have traveled Amber and the surrounding Kingdoms. This knowledge will be helpful to you in the future, perhaps sooner than you might think."

At your question about the King, however, her resolve temporarily cracks. Her face freezes, and then she throws her hands over her face, concealing what are obviously quiet tears. "Oh, Shiro, I don't know what's happening at all. I have tried to keep the family at ease, but with Julian off to the border, Benedict away and unavailable, and Rand... Rand..." She can't even finish, and she weeps again, but briefly.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/03/2004 at 11:55:28

Shiro tries to mask his surprise at the possibility of Benedict being his father. "He has visited Nippon?", Shiro thinks to himself. He casts his mind back to his youth, trying to remember every detail he was ever told about his father. Every description he had ever heard, anything that might confirm Vialle's suspicions. His dealings with Benedict have been very limited, but he has heard much in his travels in Amber and the Golden Circle about his prowess and tactical mastery. He has even visited Benedict's rock garden many times. It very much reflects the man. Simple in design and yet complex in the details.

A puzzled look crosses Shiro's face. "Sooner than you might think"? Now I have heard that the Queen "sees" without sight, and if I had not been gazing into her lovely eyes myself, I would have dismissed it as rumor or just heightened intuition. But I now believe her eyes do see. See into the depths of my being, my soul. Does she see my inner desires, does she comprehend?

Shiro's self-reflection is interrupted as the Queen begins sobbing, and he quickly crosses the barrier of space between them, kneeling before her. He reaches to remove her hands from her face, once again gazing into those beautiful eyes. "My Queen, I did not mean to cause you grief. Please... it breaks my heart to see you like this. What may I do to ease your burden? I offer my sword in your service. If my life or death will serve, it is yours to command. Upon my sword and my honor, I swear this to you."

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/03/2004 at 12:56:01

Vialle pulls herself together, and gently takes one of her hands back to wipe her eyes. "Oh, Shiro, I did not mean to do this. But I miss Random so, and I am very worried for him. I've been holding myself together for so long now, that I was taken off-guard by your question." She stares into your eyes with her sightless ones, but she seems to plumb the depths of your being with them. "I thank you humbly for your offer of servitude, and I do have a request to make. Know now that I am leaving Amber today. I have been advised that I should travel away for my safety, to a place difficult indeed for most people to reach. It is possible, or more properly said *expected*, that Gerard, Bleys, Caine and Flora will have some sort of mischief befall them soon, and that the realm will be emptied of the third generation. The younger generation, your generation, appears safe - and we know not why. But since you will be here and we will not, I make this request of you. Care for Amber, and for the safety of her citizens. This series of attacks is undoubtedly a prelude to some sort of effort to either conquer or destroy the Golden City. Amber will need a strong defense, and knowledge to understand what has happened and how to stop and undo it. I call upon you, Prince Shiro, to guard against internal dissension among the ranks of the younger generation. Amber is home to much intrigue and suspicion amongst family - and it will all be of tremendous harm if it continues during this time of ultimate crisis. You will be dealing with many disparate and strong personalities - Orion, Killashandra, Tanda, Talen, Caliban, and perhaps even Merlin, Martin and Vorus - and they will need to remain focused and in harmony during this hand. You will need all of their talents, skills and experience in this time ahead. I ask of you to ensure that Amber endures, and that you find what has happened to the Elders - and my husband." Her hand holds yours tightly, and the other gently extends to feel the side of your face.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/03/2004 at 13:07:06

Shiro cannot mask his astonishment. "My Queen, I am truly honored. I will do as you have asked. It is my duty to serve." The inner turmoil of late is lessened at Vialle's cool touch.

"Or was it the focus?" Shiro asks himself. These past couple of years here and about in Amber have been difficult. Being a member of the family and being a part of the family are two different things. It is that now. My experiences with Orion notwithstanding. Surely, the others will act accordingly to preserve Amber and rally to end this threat. Won't they?

Yes, they will... one way or another.

What if one of my generation is behind this? That could explain why none of us have been attacked. Either the person doesn't know about all of us or figures that we are weak compared to the Elders. We may be weak in raw power and experience, but not in resolve. Beware my cousins, I view you all with suspicion.

"Have you met my all my cousins, my Queen? I am anxious to meet them and do not wish to offend out of ignorance. Is there anything specific you can tell me about each of them?"

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/03/2004 at 13:46:30

Vialle relaxes visibly as you accept her charge - her face brightens and she slowly inhales. "Thank you, Prince Shiro - you are of a strong and capable line, regardless of your lineage, and you will serve the Golden City well and faithfully, I know in my heart." She listens patiently to your response, and then motions for you to sit back on the couch as she moves back as well. "I will share what information I have, and I have tried to learn what I can. Some of your siblings are a good deal more secretive than others, however - and others have effectively been raised in secret." She takes a sip of tea, then continues.

"Orion is a son of Corwin, and was imprisoned during the Interregnum along with Corwin. However, his imprisonment was for his own protection, as someone had made an attempt on his life. Ran...my husband shared this with me, but made sure to advise me that he had never found out the assassin, so it was still a potential threat. I trust in your confidence, Shiro, that this will remain secret as is necessary. He has Corwin's strength of character, to be sure. He has dwelled in Amber for many years - he was raised by the Castle's Master of Horses. I've spoken with Duke Colvin many times, and we both agree that Orion is a fine young man."

"Now, Killashandra is a recent arrival. She has been raised in a Shadow named Averdor, which has many similarities to Amber in feel and technology. I do not know her heritage, but she has essayed the Pattern, so there is no denying it. She has only been in Amber for a year or so, but already they find it a mockery with the Church of the Unicorn over her mount - a steed with a large central horn on the forehead and black-red colorations. They had it a crossing of the Royal Unicorn. I am somewhat surprised that she would flaunt this animal so openly, as it apparently has the ability to change shape into some object she carries with her. She seems a casual sort, and new to the ways of Amber. I don't know if she's ready right now for the challenges you all will face, but she has the capabilities within her."

"Tanda I only know by name, and I believe her story to be a sad one. She is most definitely Gerard's daughter, but he rarely speaks of her, and when her name is spoken, he grows angry and silent. But she seems to plumb the depths of your being with them. "I thank you humbly for your offer of servitude, and I do have a request to make. Know now that I am leaving Amber today. I have been advised that I should travel away for my safety, to a place difficult indeed for most people to reach. It is possible, or more properly said *expected*, that Gerard, Bleys, Caine and Flora will have some sort of mischief befall them soon, and that the realm will be emptied of the third generation. The younger generation, your generation, appears safe - and we know not why. But since you will be here and we will not, I make this request of you. Care for Amber, and for the safety of her citizens. This series of attacks is undoubtedly a prelude to some sort of effort to either conquer or destroy the Golden City. Amber will need a strong defense, and knowledge to understand what has happened and how to stop and undo it. I call upon you, Prince Shiro, to guard against internal dissension among the ranks of the younger generation. Amber is home to much intrigue and suspicion amongst family - and it will all be of tremendous harm if it continues during this time of ultimate crisis. You will be dealing with many disparate and strong personalities - Orion, Killashandra, Tanda, Talen, Caliban, and perhaps even Merlin, Martin and Vorus - and they will need to remain focused and in harmony during this hand. You will need all of their talents, skills and experience in this time ahead. I ask of you to ensure that Amber endures, and that you find what has happened to the Elders - and my husband." Her hand holds yours tightly, and the other gently extends to feel the side of your face.

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"Talen is the son of Brand. Brand apparently was grooming him as a right-hand man and agent, but Talen refused the charge and ran away. He has his father's extraordinary mental prowess, his father's temper, and his father's lack of respect for tradition and commitment. His resources will be vital to your effort, but I fear he will not easily agree to work for Amber's benefit. He is a...problem child, I believe." She smiles briefly, but with a hint of agitation.

"I do not know if he still lives, but Caliban was a lieutenant of Eric during the Interregnum, and performed many secret missions for him. He was also rumored that Caliban was Eric's son. It was said that he was slain at the end of the War, and we had heard nothing from him. However, Gerard assured us that Caliban was still alive, and intended to contact him. I know there is some unique quality to him, but Random said it would be better for me if I didn't know. I'm not sure why - I am intimately familiar with my father of the Third Generation and his...follies. I wonder what Caliban can be to be so hidden."

"My stepson Martin is adamant about not returning to Amber, and given his experiences at Brand's hand, I cannot disagree. Besides, he is...unfocused at the moment, and may not be able to help in the way you and your siblings will need. I would almost ask that he is to be kept out of the affair, but that may be my love for my stepson speaking, and not my sensibilities."

"Corwin's son Merlin, being the son of Amber and Chaos together, has many people to appease and many viewpoints to consider. Consequently, it is difficult for him to express loyalty to any one side. Dara, his mother, believes him to be a tool to unify Chaos and Amber, but I do not think he wishes to play the part she has arranged. He has stated a desire to remain neutral - he has a natural diplomat's reflexes. His education will be harsh indeed one day, and he will be forced to choose his side and abandon the other, I fear. He has contacted me very recently regarding his father's whereabouts, but none of us knew what happened to Corwin after he left a few days ago."

She shudders a little, then sips her tea to calm her nerves. "Vorus...Vorus has gone off in a different direction than most of his siblings. He is interested in technology and science, and refuses to live in Amber until he discovers the scientific principles that will, in his words, 'bring Amber into its own as a power in every respect.' I believe he has suffered some sort of grievous injury, as the left side of his face and his left eye have been replaced by some artificial. He spoke to Random a few days ago, and apparently asked for modifications to be made in an agreement between the Crown and Vorus. I asked Random about this 'agreement,' as I'd never heard of it before, but he only said that Benedict arranged it and that only Benedict would be capable of modifying it successfully. I do not know much more, save one note of warning that Random gave me upon learning that Vorus was traveling to Amber. He said that Caine had told him something, and had never explained why, but that Random trusted Caine in this one suggestion. *Don't let him touch you.* I shudder to think about it."

She looks away, and he notices the light in the windows of the Solarium, which have changed with the passing of time. "Oh, my dear, I hadn't realized it was so late in the morning. I can answer a few more brief questions, but if I am to leave, there is an appointed hour and it approaches. I should return to my chambers and collect some things." She finishes her tea and sets the empty cup on the table.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/03/2004 at 13:56:17

Shiro sits and listens intently. Never interrupting or asking for any clarification. His tea forgotten and has long since lost the its dancing steam. Like a soldier, he soaks up the information as even the smallest detail may prove to be the key to unify his cousins under a common cause, "My cause", he thinks to himself.

"My sincerest regret for having delayed you, my Queen. I thank you for the information and most of all, the honor of your trust. Rest easy knowing that I shall not fail you or Amber." Shiro bows deep and long, confident that Queen will be safe. With purpose in his stride, Shiro seeks his uncle Bleys on the gathering of his cousins... and other questions. Like where the hell is Sterling?

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/03/2004 at 14:00:19

Vialle returns the bow, but to a shallower depth, as is appropriate in *your* customs. "Thank you, Shiro, for speaking with me and for your promise. I know you to be of the strongest resolve - I trust in you to fight for Amber and all she stands for." She allows you to leave first, and then leaves the Solarium as well, heading back up to her quarters.

You make a cursory search of the first floor of the Castle, but there is no sign of Sterling. You do find a Guard watch commander, and you ask him if he has seen Sterling. "I believe I saw someone like that heading out to the infirmary some time ago. He appeared to be in a hurry."

You dash the short distance out to the Castle Guard barracks, where the infirmary is attached. But as you approach, you see a moderately-sized party of Rangers from Arden. They are beating two bodies on stretchers into the infirmary. You see the physician emerge, a concerned look on his face.

The first figure is a young woman, but appears to be in her early thirties. She is of average height, and an athletic build. Her hair is long and dark, which is tied back in one long braid - but several wavy strands have broken free, possibly due to some physical exertions. They frame a heart shaped face, with high round cheekbones, curving down to a small chin. Her full, pale lips are slightly parted and shallow scratches mar her face and neck. There are otherwise very few lines on her face - it will make sure he bears your words." He organizes the company of Rangers that brought the two here and they quickly depart. The physician is mulling over their wounds, dabbing ointment here and there. He notices your polite attention. "One moment, milord. I will render what attention I can to these, and then we can speak. They have been poisoned with some sort of venom - and the man isn't responding as well as Princess Tanda to the normal treatments." He steps into the private room that Tanda was carried into, and you hear some conversation.

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Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/03/2004 at 14:14:39

"It is not your business of where I choose to go woodsman. But you have done your duty well in bringing them here, I commend you on your actions. Be sure to let Prince Orion know of this immediately and that I have not noticed his presence in the castles as of late. He should check in sooner rather than later."

As the woodsman take their leave, Shiro turns his attention to Tanda and her companion. A fierce warrior? In your world you would be a school and stoned for dressing as a warrior. I sense a boldness in you, one that not many women have or far less act upon. My cousin says you are a bonded and the arts of war and I will not question her verisimilitude. Though I will have to see it, truly believe it. I guess the fact that you are here wounded in an able right lend some validity to your status as a warrior. If you were found dead, then the question would be moot. But it is your companion I am intrigued by... mostly who the hell is he?

Shiro waits patiently as the physician works on his patients. Making eye contact now and again, Shiro sends a clear message that he wants to know his assessment of their condition.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/07/2004 at 18:53:09

Shiro nods to the woodsmen as they depart, certain his words will reach cousin Orion.

Jez, who the hell is Jez? At the very least a travelling companion. Could be more since she is obviously concerned about his well being and not in the right frame of mind to recognize the castle grounds. Not my place to speculate nor my place to care. But if this attack on our presence situation, then two sources of information are better than one.

"I am grateful you could tend to you cousin's wounds so quickly and efficiently. I did not give me to overhear your conversation with Tanda, but if my suspicions are right, you might want to make more of the anti-venom just in case. He knew you said that Tanda's companion was in a coma, a warrior such as he should not be in living death. Your honest opinion, is there any hope that I will recover? And how soon will it be until I can speak with Tanda? I understand she is in need of rest, but I do not take attacks on my family lightly and in lieu of recent events, I am less inclined to be merciful to those that do us and Amber harm."

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/08/2004 at 12:34:27

Huntington smiles warmly at your praise. "You honor me with your words, Prince. I am glad to assist as I can. And yes, you are right - I will stay up a little to make more of the anti-venom, both to administer another dose to the man if it is warranted, and to help in case another victim is brought in. But it does not keep too long, so I will make a few doses and then simply gather the ingredients to make more if it is needed."

His expression grows more somber as you speak of Jez' condition. "It is as I said - the man is in a coma, unconscious beyond my means to reach. I have seen patients emerge from such a sleep in hours, I have heard tell of people remaining under the black cloak for years. But I have hope that he will recover - for that is my calling and my faith."

He moves away from the door to Tanda's quarters, beckoning you to a small counter. "I will speak while I gather ingredients for another dose of the anti-venom - for it is growing late, and I do not wish to be up the whole evening." He picks up a few vials as he continues. "Princess Tanda will be all right come morning. I believe she has the traditional residence of the Royal Family, and neither the venom gets the rest she enjoys nor her hair too severely. I would be surprised if she were not up and about tomorrow morning - but that only if she now gets the rest she needs." He pours a few powders into a stone bowl and begins to grind them. "I will certainly ask that you be contacted when she awakens - but I suspect the simplest route will be to inform her that you wish to speak to her, as I don't think I'll be able to keep her here tomorrow evening." He laughs quietly as he pours a little water into the bowl. "Forgive my slight impudence, but I am always pleasantly amazed by the energy and the health of your family. I have seen many injuries that would cripple other men inflicted on your aunts and uncles, and these wounds were shrugged off, almost with a lack of interest. Treasure the gift of your blood, for it will do you good service."

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/08/2004 at 14:21:10

Despite himself, Shiro smiles at Huntington's "improbant" manner. It is quite refreshing to have someone talk candidly. "No forgiveness is needed. You speak the simple truth and I value the truth above all. Blood is what binds us together and at the same time the source of all ills."

Shiro watches Huntington for a few moments. The mysteries of how the body works, let alone heals itself has always puzzled him. Anyone who understands and can even aid in that process is to be both respected and feared.

"If the princess is to be able in the morning, then there is no need to send word to me. I'm sure we will run into each other in short order. I shall take my leave to you Huntington, but again, I applaud your skills..." A wry smile appears on Shiro's face. "...and your impudence. I hope I am never in need of the former and I look forward to hearing more of the latter."

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [SisyphusX](#) on 06/15/2004 at 12:51:52

Huntington smiles warmly. "I thank you for your company, Prince Shiro. Let us hope that your relationship continues to be casual and not professional." He smiles widely as he goes back to the private room into which Jez was taken.

You step out into the soft rays of the afternoon sun, but it is growing close to evening. The castle is rather quiet, and indeed looks rather peaceful - if you were still unaware of the roiling tension and unrest that swells even now beneath it's contented exterior. But there's still some time left to the day. You remember hearing that Bleys would be in a parade in the city, Caine was out conducting naval maneuvers, and Flora and Bleys are preparing for tomorrow's visit from House Hendrake. You believe that Orion is more than likely surveying his new realm of Arden.

Re: PROLOGUE - Droplets of Blood - Shiro
Post by [Shiro](#) on 06/17/2004 at 01:20:24

No need to shudder down to the city just to catch Bleys in a situation where he couldn't talk anyway. Might as well find Aunt Flora, since Bleys will be first with her later. A runner runs down Shiro's back even thinking of such a... he spritned talk. Aunt Flora is a creature I just do not understand. With or without a woman... I could overlook that, but... but... I dunno. She makes me uncomfortable with all her talking. She speaks, but she says nothing. There is something behind her eyes though; quite perhaps? Not that I usually go that high when I set my eyes upon her. She should be in someone's concubine rather than arranging state visits. The elders know her best and perhaps see something in her I do not. Perhaps they give her such jobs to give the illusion she is important? Who knows.
